

VZCZCXRO7494  
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNN  
DE RUEHBK #3071 3380936  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 040936Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9180  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS BANGKOK 003071

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958, AS AMENDED: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: Labor Group Presses for Ratification of ILO Conventions

REFTEL: BANGKOK 2032 (Labor Leaders Concerned About Rights and Less Work)

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1. (SBU) On November 20 Econoffs met with Manas Kosul, the head of the Confederation of Thai Labor (CTL), at the organization's headquarters in Samut Prakarn, approximately 45 minutes outside of Bangkok. The CTL is one of Thailand's twelve national labor congresses with approximately 70,000 members from 165 labor unions. Accompanied by a team of nine confederation officers, Manas explained that CTL's primary goal is Thailand's ratification of International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions 87 and 98, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, and Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining, respectively. He explained that CTL representatives met Thai Labor Ministry officials on October 26 to press for ratification of the Conventions and improved enforcement of Thai labor laws.

2. (SBU) Manas praised the Ministry of Labor's efforts on the Conventions, noting the Ministry established a committee, including representatives from different labor confederations, to prepare for ratification. Manas is hopeful ratification will take place before a June 2010 International Labor Conference in Geneva. Ratification of the convention has been a primary goal of other labor organizations as well (reftel). (Note: A Ministry of Labor (MOL) official told us October 9 that the RTG plans to seek ratification of the Conventions, although she suggested a longer time frame will be necessary. The MOL is planning a public hearing on the Conventions, after which it hopes to recommend that the Cabinet submit the Conventions to the Parliament for ratification. End Note.)

3. (SBU) Manas reviewed other priority areas for the CTL, including a reform of Thailand's minimum wage system. He explained that between Thailand's 76 provinces, there are 23 different minimum wage rates. CTL proposes an across-the-board increase to the minimum wage and a modification to the minimum wage system. Its goal: to decrease the difference between the lowest and the highest rates that causes laborers to uproot themselves to move to other areas in search of higher pay. Specifically, the CTL calls for wage rates to be differentiated only by three zones: urban, rural, and suburban.

JOHN